

**Testimony on the Piney Branch ES Pilot Trash Washer Project**  
before the Montgomery County Board of Education  
November 11, 2009 Public Hearing on Facilities and Boundary Issues

by Nadine Bloch, Brenda Platt  
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We acknowledge the tremendous work you are doing to address boundary issues, overcrowding, capital improvements, and long-range facility planning. These are big, important issues. Thank you for holding these hearings to solicit public input.

We are happy to see that "Providing Schools That Are Environmentally Safe, Secure, Functionally Efficient, and Comfortable" is Objective #4 of the MCPS's Facility Planning Objectives and that "MCPS is committed to sustainability and conservation of resources in the design and operation of all facilities." \$1.494 billion in capital improvements is a lot of money and we believe MCPS should use this purchasing power to green facilities wherever possible and adopt a modernization plan that reflects the school system's environmental priorities. This language could be strengthened in the plan and incorporated throughout. We laud MCPS for its commitment to recycling, energy conservation, indoor air quality, and green building LEED certification. However, much more could be done to incorporate sustainability and resource conservation, and is particularly critical as greening initiatives frequently save money over the long-term:

- not just recycling, but also reusables as well as composting, and composting on-site
- installation of rain gardens and permeable surfaces to cost-effectively help meet new stormwater management requirements (\$3.77 million is allocated in the 6-year budget to stormwater discharge management alone)
- promoting edible gardens and native landscaping
- preference on furniture repair rather than on purchasing new (NYC did this and saves \$120,000 a year while supporting 3 local furniture repair shops)
- accepting refurbished equipment
- and more

Page 3-8 of the six-year plan mentions that "Smaller green technology and conservation pilots are being introduced at several schools to provide a healthy and effective learning environment for students and staff." While these pilots are not specified, we hope our pilot lunch tray washing project can be one. The PTA's Young Activist Club at Piney Branch Elementary School has raised more than enough money to pay for a dishwasher, its installation, durable trays, washable flatware, and operating costs for the remainder of the school year. This pilot will not cost MCPS money, but in fact would save thousands of dollars in avoided purchasing costs for disposable trays and flatware. Indeed by documenting costs and savings, this pilot will provide valuable data to inform future capital improvement plans and is quite relevant to tonight's focus on facilities, long-range planning, and budgets. We are also here tonight because there are so few opportunities for the public to address the whole Board this fall.

When we met with Mr. Barclay in June, he indicated his commitment to getting rid of polystyrene lunch trays in the school system but thought our pilot program was too expensive

based on data staff provided, which indicated that the price tag for installing a dishwasher was \$57,000. He was also wrongly informed that 2 workers were needed to operate the washer, thereby doubling labor costs. (As it turns out, this is not part of MD health code.) Mr. Barclay offered a compromise position: replace styrofoam with paperboard trays that would be recycled. This was rejected at the meeting by the students. At our July 28th meeting with Ms. Brandman, Ms. Docca, the director of Facilities & Maintenance, Joe Lavorgna, and Kathy Lazor with Food Services, we took issue with what we considered to be inflated costs by staff for our pilot and took issue with the MCPS push for us to use our money on paperboard trays. We do not understand the push for a system known to cost at least three times more than the polystyrene system, but the reluctance to allow us to test a reusable system with the known potential to save money. We understand the current economic climate being faced by our school district. It is for this reason that the students opted against the paperboard trays and set out to raise enough money to cover the costs of their project. Saving money is THE reason our pilot centers on a rebuilt washer.

At the July 28th meeting, staff made clear they did not have the resources to conduct a utility survey or undertake a site-specific feasibility study for this pilot. We thus agreed to pay for such a study and hired Burke Design. A copy of Burke Design's "Tray Washing Feasibility Study for Piney Branch Elementary School" is attached to this testimony.

We are pleased to report that the Burke Design feasibility study shows that the full-year cost for our pilot is ~\$11,000, a fraction of the \$57,000 figure provided by Facilities & Maintenance.

**We respectfully ask that you expediently and unanimously approve the PBES Pilot Tray Washer Project at your next meeting Dec 8th (if not sooner!) so that the County can start saving money in the new year.**

Thank you in advance for your help in bringing to fruition this pilot project to cost-effectively modernize a Downcounty Consortium school facility. Only through a pilot program of this nature will a washable ware system and its cost benefits be fully explored and known.

Thank you for your attention.